

The New Dynamics of Democratization in South Korea
The Internet and the Emergence of the Netizen
by Ronda Hauben

I - The Global Internet and the Netizen Experience in Korea

In 2002, the Sisa Journal, a Korean weekly, named Netizens as the Person of the Year.(1) This represented a rare recognition of a new and significant phenomenon that has emerged with the development and spread of the Internet.(2) The netizen has become a significant actor in the struggle for democracy. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in South Korea.

Describing the progressive impact that the Internet is having around the world, Choi Jang Jip, a professor at Korea University, writes (3):

"[A]ccompanied by the development of communication technologies, globalization creates new elements that enable people to counter undemocratic or antidemocratic elements.....In the instrumental sense, globalization enables communication for democracy in cyberspace. In terms of content, a greater affinity between worldwide democratic values and norms and the unique experiences of younger Koreans in the democratization movement becomes possible."

Explaining the dissatisfaction of Koreans with the process of democratic development in South Korea, Choi recognizes that it is the Internet and the democratic processes that the Internet makes possible that provide a continuum with the democratic processes and practices that helped to win the June 1987 victory in South Korea. He writes:

"Political society is preoccupied with political parties, political elites, and mass media, which produces and transmits dominant discourse...however, cyberspace has no barriers to entry and is an absolutely free space over which no hegemonic discourse can exercise a dominant influence."(Choi 2000, p. 40)

Choi maintains that the Korean experience of democratic practice is important not only for the democratization struggle in Korea, but also as a contribution to the worldwide struggle for democracy:

"The citizen movement using Internet is just a beginning stage. It will become popular in the near future and change the quality and contents of movements because of the rapid internet diffusion and information expansion." (Choi 2000, p. 50)

There is a need to document and understand the experience of netizens in Korea not only to support the democratization struggle in Korea itself, but also toward understanding the contribution of this netizen experience to the worldwide struggle for democracy.

II - A Model for Democratization

Along with the recognition that the experience of democratic struggle provides the basis for the continuing struggle for democracy in South Korea, Choi believes that there is a need for public understanding of democracy. He writes:

"In any given nation or society, democracy develops in parallel with the level of understanding in that society. In order for democracy to take root and to develop in quality, [a] social understanding of democracy has to develop. This is why civic education for democracy is important, and it is necessary to increase public interest and participation through such education. When this happens, people's intellectual curiosity for understanding will increase, and so will their social participation. This is how democracy develops." (Choi 2005, p. 13)

To develop such an understanding, he proposes the need for critical discussion and debate about democracy (Choi 2005, p. 13). Such a process of discussion and experimentation with democracy is currently happening on the Internet in South Korea. Yet because it is taking place at a grassroots level, online and in the Korean language, it is little understood and even more rarely considered in the world outside of the Internet. Choi himself has written a recent book, "Democracy after Democratization: the Korean Experience," documenting the history and progress of the struggle for democracy in South Korea. (4) The only mention in his book of the online developments, however, is the cover, which shows a massive demonstration in Seoul that took place in 2004 that was made possible by the online democratic developments. The online newspaper "OhmyNews" is credited for the photo. Thus the book and its cover demonstrate the confusion about the contribution to the democratic struggle in South Korea by the Internet and the netizens. This is understandable as the Internet and the netizens are relatively recent phenomena and their contribution to the struggle for democracy is still poorly understood. This paper is intended as a contribution to the discussion and debate about democracy that Choi advocates.

III - A New Model for Democracy and the Need for a Communication Infrastructure

Before discussing the Internet and the netizens and their impact on the democratization struggle in South Korea, however, I want to propose a model for democracy that I will utilize in my paper. A number of Korean scholars note that a minimalist conception of democracy is inadequate as a goal. Han Sang-Jin, a Professor at Seoul National University, disagrees with scholars who depend on institutional politics from within the political system. (5) Han writes:

"If the outside energy dries up or disappears, it seems very unlikely that any political leader or faction would pursue structural reform. by its own initiative"

As part of his support for grassroots political activity, Han proposes the need to support a culture of diversity, a culture which nourishes the quest for a conscious social identity. He writes:

"Crucial for democratic consolidation...is the capacity of civil society as the basis of democratic institutions in which cultural identities and diversities are nurtured and developed. It is probably in this sense that one may expect that new visions for civilization will also come from East Asia. It is indeed tempting to think about the possibility, and it will be as much so in the future as it is now." (Han 1995, p. 13)

Han's intuition that democratic development requires a cultural

process is similar to the model for democracy created by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the US in the early 1960s. An essay by Arnold Kaufman, a Professor at the University of Michigan, inspired the development of the SDS model of democracy which has become known as 'participatory democracy.' The essay Kaufman wrote, "Participatory Democracy and Human Initiative" helped to set the foundation for the SDS model of democracy.

Kaufman writes, "Participation means both personal initiative -- that men feel obliged to resolve social problems and social opportunity -- that society feels obliged to maximize the possibility for personal initiatives to find creative outlets." (6) Thus for Kaufman and then for the SDS, the concept of participatory democracy had two aspects, one a role for the person as part of a social process, and two, a role for the society to encourage the creative initiative of the person.

This is different from the minimalist conceptions of democracy and from conceptions relying on an elite to make the decisions for the population, or proposing that democracy means facilitating institutional competition among an elite. Kaufman, and subsequently SDS, proposed a model for democracy which had three elements:

- (1) the involvement of ordinary people actively participating to foster the changes they desire in their society.
- (2) some structural connection between the community of ordinary people and those in society who make the decisions.
- (3) a commitment by society to foster the creative development and functioning of the population

Crucial to this model is the need for a communications infrastructure to provide a public space for discussion and debate among the community of ordinary people. For such public discussion "mechanisms of voluntary association must be created through which political information can be imparted and political participation encouraged," proclaims the Port Huron Statement of SDS in the section "Towards American Democracy" (Hauben 1995, p. 7)

In a paper he wrote about the SDS vision of participatory democracy and the Internet, Michael Hauben, then a student at Columbia University, described how the creation and development of the Internet has provided the communications infrastructure identified by SDS as necessary to realize their model of participatory democracy. (Hauben 1995, p. 7)

IV - The Development of Computer Networking and Internet in South Korea

Consequently, an understanding of the history of the development of computer networking and of the Internet in South Korea and of the interconnection of the development of this infrastructure with the struggle for democracy can help to provide the needed perspective through which to view the current netizen developments.

In a paper he wrote about the history of Korean computer network, Kilnam Chon, a professor at the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) and other authors describe the development of computer networking in South Korea. (7) The earliest network began in 1982 with

networking connections set up between a computer at the Department of Computer Science at Seoul National University (SNU), and a computer at the Korean Institute of Electronics Technology (KIET) in Gumi, using a 1200 bps leased line. In January 1983, KAIST was added. Also in 1983, there were connections from South Korea to a computer in the Netherlands (mcvax) and then to a computer in the US (hplabs). These connections made it possible for researchers and students to connect with others who were part of the developing international computer networks. Computer networking for the public in South Korea in the 1980s was via connections to commercial networking provided by the Korean Telecom. PC communications began with email (Dacom's Hangeul Mail) in 1984 which in 1986 became part of what was known as Chollian. KETEL (Korean Economic Daily Telepress) services began in 1988 and became known as HITEL. By 1995, HITEL made it possible for users to connect to the Internet. (Chon 2005, p. 2-3)

A plan to build the Korean National Information Infrastructure was created in 1983. Through the 1980s, there was continued research and development of networking. Though there were commercial networking services available to the public in the 1990s, it was not until 1994-5 that Internet connectivity began to be publicly available. This early Internet connectivity was limited to 64 Kbps with modem and dial up access until July 1998.

In July 1998, high speed Internet access began to be available to computer users either through cable tv networks provided by Thrunet or by Korean Telecom and Hanaro Telecom offering a version of DSL called ADSL. (Chon 2005, p. 4)

A combination of factors led to the fact that this access was relatively low cost and welcomed by different sectors of the Korean population. Consequently, in 2004, over 70% of the households in Korea had broadband Internet service. This included Internet access availability in 11 million homes. "The widespread availability of broadband Internet services," writes Chon, "provided the impetus for Korea to become the leading Internet stronghold nation of the world." (Chon 2005, p. 7)

One of the important contributors to the spread of Internet connectivity in Korea were Internet cafes called PC bangs. The first one opened in Sept. 15, 1995. By 1999 there were 150 such cafes. The widespread popularity of computer games in Korea along with the popularity in the 1990s of online discussion communities contributed to a strong demand for inexpensive Internet broadband service to the home.

In describing the development of computer networking in South Korea, Chon notes the importance of the netizen. Several examples have been documented of online discussion which led to offline social or political activity. These include the massive cheering at the world cup games in Korea in June 2002, and the demonstrations protesting the deaths of two school girls by a US armored truck, the acquittal of the US soldiers responsible by a US military court, and the protests against SOFA (State of Forces Agreement between the US and South Korea) in 2002 which helped to bring about the election of the Korean President Rho Moo-hyun.

In an article comparing Internet development in South Korea, Japan and Singapore, Izumi Aizu, a Japanese networking activist and researcher,

notes the advanced nature of the Korean networking developments. Izumi attributes this advanced nature in large part to the desire and support by Koreans for freedom of speech. "The Korean political situation changed rapidly during the last 15 years," he writes:

"It was only 1987 when the first real free and democratic election took place for the presidency. Until the mid 80s, there was no such thing as freedom of speech or freedom of press under the military autocracy. Now with the power of computer networking Korean people become very active and aggressive in exercising their freedom online and offline, a long-awaited value indeed. Now netizen is the common word for Korean people...ordinary citizens who want to speak up and communicate." (8)

Izumi attributes the Korean regard for "freedom of speech as one of the key factors behind the expansion of broadband, too."

V - The Netizen

Agreeing that freedom of speech was a key factor promoting the development of the Internet in Korea, Chon describes the United Nation's program "Sustainable Development Network Program" (SDNP) hosted in South Korea by the YMCA as one of the places where it was possible to express diverse views. "It was in the early 1990s," he writes, "that individuals of the general public were able to express their political and social opinions through the Internet." The more recent online participation of users as netizens on the Internet is an "extension of online communities...formed through PC communications in the early 1990s." (9)

The experience of online communities and interest in what was being created online was a common experience among those who had access to computer networking in the 1990s. Describing this period, Hauben explains that it was a period when a number of people online began to find a new identity, and to develop a consciousness of themselves citizens of the new online world. In research he began in 1992 to try to understand the social impact of the growing networking developments, Hauben came to understand that the Internet and computer networks were serious subjects for study. He recognized that online users had begun to develop a consciousness of themselves as contributors to the online world, and that the impact of such participation on users was a important new phenomena to be understood.

Hauben had seen the word 'net.citizen' online referring to someone who acted as a citizen online. Thinking about the social concern and consciousness he had found among those online who were developing what was actually a new form of social identity, and about the non-geographical character of a net based form of citizenship, he contracted 'net.citizen' into the word 'netizen'. Netizen has come to describe the online social identity Hauben discovered as part of his early research on the social impact of the Internet and computer networks.

Hauben recognized that(10):

"[T]he on-line user is part of a global culture and considers him or herself to be a global citizen. This global citizen is a net citizen, or a Netizen. The world which has developed is based on communal effort to make a cooperative community."

Not all online users are considered netizens by Hauben. He reserves the term for those with a social perspective and practice. He writes(11):

"Netizens are not just anyone who comes online, and they are especially not people who come online for individual gain or profit. They are not people who come to the Net thinking it is a service. Rather they are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place."

After his initial online research into the social impact of the Net, Hauben posted the paper he had written online. The paper was titled, "Common Sense: The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net Has on People's Lives." (12) He posted it in several Usenet newsgroups and on a number of mailing lists on July 6, 1993. Soon afterwards, Hauben received comments from people around the world welcoming his research and the consciousness of themselves as netizens, as participants in this new form of online world.

The concept and consciousness of oneself as a netizen has since spread around the world. There are a number of examples of references to netizens in Korean networking posts in the early 1990s on Usenet. Also in 1996, a post on Usenet provides the Korean terms for several networking terms, and one of these is 'netizen'. (13) The word in the Korean alphabet has the same pronunciation as in English.

One user said that she was in high school in 1996 in Korea and was part of a set of students who were forming a computer club. She remembers that they chose to call their club the Netizens Computer Club.(14)

More recently, Heewon Kim, a graduate student at Yonsei University, who is researching the role of blogs in Korean society, discussed the difference between the use of 'netizen' to mean a casual user of the Internet and the use of the word for the online user with a social practice and consciousness. She writes (15):

"This is a sophisticated concept. If you have the consciousness of social/political participation and take action, you can be a netizen. If you just enjoy web surfing, it's very hard to say that you are a netizen although you spend great time for the internet."

While the netizen identity has been embraced around the world, South Korea is one of the countries where users often consider themselves to be 'netizens.'(16)

Part VI - Computer Networking in the 1990s in South Korea

Before gaining access to the Internet, Hauben had been a participant on a number of local bulletin board systems (bbs) in the early 1980s in the US. Chang Woo-Young, a Professor at Konkuk University describes similar bulletin board experiences in South Korea during the late 1980s. Chang writes (17):

"It was between 1988 and 1990 that the online space emerged in Korea. The bulletin board systems began to be actively used in the

non-political arena after June 1987, when the authoritarian regime retreated as a result of a democratic resistance movement."

In 1991, Beareun Tongshin Moim (The Society for Fair Communication) was an early political group which opened on Hitel. It was "created by 10 high school students" according to Won Sook-Yeong. (18) In 1992, The Society for Fair Communication put online a "collection of voting results from the 1992 presidential campaign as a way to supervise the election and ensure its fairness." (Won Sook-Yeon 1998, p. 8) During the Samping tragedy, when a major department store complex in Seoul collapsed due to shoddy construction, the Society for Fair Communication put online a "collection of carried bulletins about the tragedy. An estimated 500 people died. (Won Sook-Yeon 1998,p. 24)

'Hyundai Cholhak Donghohoi (The Modern Philosophy Club)', and 'Himangteo (Hope Spot)', are two of the most famous early groups on Chollian, and 'Jinbo Cheongnyeon Tongshin Dongwoohoi (The Radical Young Men's Club for Fair Communication)' was a famous early group on Naunuri. The Modern Philosophy Club started in September 1993. When three of its members were arrested, and charged with violations of the National Security Law based on their posts online, the group took up to defend them. The case led to a movement to defend freedom of speech online. The Radical Young Men's Club for Fair Communication became an advocate of direct democracy through computer networking. Among other online forums in the early 1990s in South Korea is the 'Hot Issue Discussion Forum' to discuss current issues. This was a forum on the Korea Telecom system known as ' KIDS (Korea Internet Data Service System)'. (19)

In September 1993, a forum 'Politics' was created for political discussion, and a forum called 'Acropolis' was created on the Seoul National University Computer Network. (Chang 2005a, p. 415) A book by Yun Yeon-min, titled "A Theory of Electronic Information Space: A Sociological Exploration of Computer Networks, (Seoul: Jeonyewon, p. 70-71) describes these early networking developments. Some of the organizations that set up web sites on Chollian in the 1990s included 'Green Scout', 'Kongseonhyup', 'Shinmunlo forum', 'Young Congress'.

On Naunuri, the list included the 21-Seki, Frontier (21 Century Frontier) and the Korean Christian Academy. Those on Hitel included Yeollin Jeong chak, Hoeuri (Open Policy Meeting). (Won Sook Young 1998, p. 8) Discussion on political issues also went on in more general forums like Keumaul on Hitel, Nado Hanmadi in Chollian and Yeoron Kwangjang in Naunuri. In addition to the vibrant online discussion in the 1990s, various online communities formed. Some led to joint activity or work offline. One of the most well known of these is the Red Devils which formed online in 1997 to support the Korean Soccer team. This online community developed into hundreds of thousands of members who then gave leadership to the cheering activities in support of the Korean Soccer team's world cup games in June 2002.

A Usenet post recalls early online communities in Korea in the 1990s (21):

"There were Hitel, Chollian, Naunuri, three major text based online services in Korea. I think they boomed in [the] early 90s and withered drastically as the Internet explosion occurred in mid and late 90s.

They provided the bbs, file up/download, chatting and community Services.

Their community services were very strong. I also joined some such groups and learned a lot. Community members formed a kind of connection through casual meeting, online chatting, study groups and etc. The now influential Red Devils... was at first started as one of such communities. It introduced new forms of encounter among the people with the same interest.

They also had some discussion space, similar to this news group and people expressed their ideas...."

Along with other online interactive forums for netizens, the Korean government set up forums for citizens. An early forum was set up by the Blue House just after Kim Young Sam was elected President in 1992 (22) The online forum was opened at the Blue House in 1993. After a few months, however, it stopped accepting posts from the public. One researcher suggests that this was because the presidential office and its BBS operator could not endure people's criticism of presidential policy. (23) After that users could only browse through the material online. They could no longer post. By 1997, there were 17 department and government offices which had forums on commercial computer networks.

Some researchers distinguish between the online forums where users could post themselves and discuss issues and those where users could only read what had been posted. The sites providing for interactivity and posts from users were substantially more popular than those which just provided information. (24)

VII - The Online Media 1999-2004

Media play a critical role in South Korean politics and the struggle for democracy. Choi refers to a similar observation made by Tocqueville in his study of democracy in America (ca. 1820-1840) "Tocqueville had observed as early as the mid-nineteenth century that the press in America was the secret of democracy in America." (25)

Han observed that the mass media in Korea joined the democratization struggle leading up to the June 1987 uprising. By the early 1990s, however, the mainstream conservative press was opposed to continuing democratization efforts. "For the populist reform to succeed," Han argues, "support from the mass media is essential." (26) Scholars interested in the struggle for democratization in South Korea explain that it was not until 1997, ten years after the June 1987 victory, that there was an actual transfer of political power to opposition parties in the Korean government. Even with this transfer, however, the power of the conservative media has been one of the obstacles to the reform of the political system. According to Chang, after the June 1987 victory, the conservative media emerged as an "independent political institution." (27)

Subsequently, the need for reform of the conservative media is cited as critical for a structural change of the conservative and repressive institutions in South Korea. "Without the reform of the media, no success of

the democratic reform is possible," writes Cho Hee-Yeon. (28) Cho Hee-Yeon, one of the founders of the civil society NGO People's Solidarity with Participatory Democracy (PSPD), is a Professor at Sungkonghoe University in Seoul.

The conservative press most often cited as the problem are "Chosun Ilbo", "Donga Ilbo", and "Joongang Ilbo". Chosun Ilbo (Daily Newspaper) was started March 5, 1920. It has a reputation as the South Korean print newspaper with the largest circulation (2,383,429 in 2004). The 2nd largest newspaper is Dong Ilbo, started in April 5, 1920. (In 2004 its circulation was given as 2,088,715) (29)

It is not surprising, therefore, that a movement would spring up to critique and oppose the domination of "Chosun Ilbo". This movement came to be known as the 'anti-chosun movement'. An article on the Korean Press Foundation (KPF) web site explains that the initial stimulus for the anti-chosun movement were articles in Chosun Ilbo and a monthly publication "Chosun Woban" labeling publications of Professor Choi Jang-jip as sympathetic to North Korea (30) The National Security Law of South Korea makes it a crime to give support or praise to North Korea. Such a violation can be prosecuted as a violation of the law. (31) Choi's attorney described how "The Monthly Chosun (Woban) article wrongly depicted Choi as saying the Korean War was one of 'national liberation', when in fact this was merely an introduction to a DPRK claim." When two Koreans criticized Chosun's distortion of Choi, they were given court fines. Supporters online organized to help them to pay the fines. Following is the description KPF provides of the incident:

"A pioneering movement to give vent to consumer grievances against the press was the 'Anti-Chosun Movement' organized by civic groups to denounce the conservative paper's cold war mentality. What prompted the movement were the Chosun Ilbo November 1998 articles taking issue with the ideological background of Prof. Choi Jang-jip of Korea University. Prof. Gang Jun-man of Chunbuk University and Jeong Ji-hwan, reporter of monthly magazine 'Mahl' were sued by a Chosun Ilbo reporter for their criticism of the controversial articles. When penalties were imposed on the two defendants, netizens launched an on-line campaign to collect money to help pay the fine, starting up the movement."

The KPF explains that not only does the anti-chosun movement critique Chosun Ilbo, but it also provides a focus to oppose the structural flaws of the country's print media. Waging an effective challenge to the power of the conservative media has long been recognized as part of the struggle against the forces of reaction in South Korea. For example, the newspaper Hankyoreh Shinmun was started in 1988, shortly after the victory of June 1987, as a means of providing a voice for the news and views of the democratic movement. With the economic collapse of 1997, however, it became ever more obvious that there was a need for more of a progressive media presence in South Korea. Along with criticism of other institutional problems within the Korean society which were blamed for the crisis, the uncritical nature of the conservative press was targeted as contributing to the economic problems. "Mainstream South Korean news outlets failed to apply a critical eye to economic reporting before the Asian slump," one reporter wrote, "a fact that many analysts say contributed to the crash." He admitted, "We were guilty of printing government statements without checking the facts." (32) Pressure from editors contributed to the reporters uncritical reporting. In response to the financial crisis, the Korean government embraced Internet and

networking development as a means to provide for economic recovery. (33)

As part of a growing interest in the Internet in South Korea in the later part of the 1990s, the mainstream conservative press began to set up online editions of their newspapers. Still another development, however, was the beginning of an online news media represented by the birth of OhmyNews. Phrases that came into vogue after the economic crisis included, "We were late to industrialization but let's lead in digitalization," and "We shall lead Korea to become an information superpower." Encouraged by these developments, a journalist with the progressive monthly journal *Mahl*, Oh Yeon Ho, became interested in the potential of the Internet to make possible the creation of a progressive media that could challenge the power of the mainstream media. Oh had found that media like *Chosun Ilbo* were able to determine what would be considered as news. If a story was published in the *Monthly Mahl*, it would get little public attention or attention from other media. If a story was published by one of the conservative media organizations, however, it would be given attention in other media and would in that way be considered news. Oh hoped that OhmyNews would transform the South Korean media environment so that "the quality of news determined whether a story was treated with serious attention by the other media, rather than the power and prestige of the media organization that printed the article." (34)

Also Oh recognized that the Internet provided a new and interesting environment for a different form of news media, a news media that could support collaborative efforts. The Internet publications of the mainstream media were composed of articles transferred from their print publications. Instead, "OhmyNews", based itself on the interactive and plastic environment provided by the Internet. (35) A beta version of OhmyNews appeared in December 1999, but it officially began production on February 22, 2000 at 2:22 pm. Oh proclaimed his commitment to make OhmyNews a model for a more modern form of journalism, a form of journalism appropriate for the 21st Century. (36)

To achieve this goal, OhmyNews not only publishes stories by its staff, but it welcomes articles from netizens, from citizen journalists. They are paid a small fee for each article that is published, depending on where in the newspaper the story first appears. By incorporating the articles by netizen journalists into the main content of the online newspaper, OhmyNews is able to encompass a broader focus than more traditional newspapers. Netizen journalists often provide breaking news stories that the more traditional press in South Korea would have ignored or missed. OhmyNews also provides online forums so that netizens can comment on the articles published or submit articles into a special section where the staff doesn't determine the placement of the articles. In its Korean edition, OhmyNews has been able to draw on the forms that have made online forums participatory and interactive.

Soon after OhmyNews was created, it began to transform the practices of journalism and to provide support for the civil society social movement. This movement more and more based itself on the Internet and on the potential it offered for political involvement of a broader section of the population. (37) More recently, OhmyNews has begun to look for ways to relate to the blogging community and includes a section on its web site for blogs.

The online media in South Korea includes a number of different forms which provide netizens with varied ways to participate. Portals like

Daum and Naver post news items and encourage discussion among users. Commenting on the popularity of these interactive sites, which has led to less online readership for other news sites, a Korea Times reporter writes (38):

"Portals do not think that they are wholly to blame for the adverse effect. They suggest that the problems are due in part to the nature of Internet where every netizen can speak out."

Another online site, DC Inside (www.decinside.com) was begun with one purpose but soon developed differently. Originally it was an online web site to share information about digital cameras and photography. This site has become a significant part of the netizen community in Korea as it has expanded to include discussion of social and political issues. The web site adopted a policy that every post to it contain a photo. Those contributing to DC Inside "spend hours viewing digital photos that have been uploaded on a site and then post their opinions of any images that catch their fancy." (39)

Among the issues that are cited as the subject of substantive discussion on DC Inside are the Apollo Anton Ono incident where a Korean skater who came in first to the finish line at the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympics was disqualified. The gold medal then went to the American skater who had come in second. There are other events like the election of Roh Moo-Hyun, the first head of state said to be elected by netizens, and the candle light demonstrations against the impeachment of Roh, which grew out of online discussions by netizens.

Other online forums which have become part of the alternative Internet media are Seoprise (www.seoprise.com) and its offshoots. Describing the achievements of online journalism in Korea, Chang points to the diversification of the participants and the varying methods of online public discussion. He writes, "This newly enabled diversification places online journalism in an antithetical position vis-a-vis traditional journalism which has tended to standardize methods of message transmission and the relationship between senders and recipients of messages." (40) The more traditional media has been criticized for their inability to foster public discussion of divergent social opinions. This is attributed to the fact that the conservative media is handicapped by their connection to commercial and political powers.

Chang believes that the online media, such as OhmyNews and other less widely known examples, have "emerged as a powerful alternative journalism by challenging the existing conservative media." (Chang 2005b, p. 925) The ability of the online media to support and encourage netizen participation is a pivotal factor. Access to these varied forms of online to interactive communication is a support for netizens to be part of the struggle for more democracy in Korea.

Chang proposes that newspapers without an off-line edition may be considered as genuine examples of online journalism. He includes newsgroups and discussion forums (sometimes called bbs's) as online journalism. "Korean citizens," Chang writes, "no longer passively accept the agenda put forward by the traditional media; they are now producers of messages. Their writings -- in bulletin boards, discussion rooms, and their own websites and blogs -- have already intruded into the realm of journalism and even beyond. Messages they produce trigger online

discussions and consensus-building. Such online activities may even be coalesced into collective actions that assume the characteristics of social movements." (Chang 2005b, p. 926) Other important aspects of such online discussion include the ability to determine the salient aspects of an issue through the discussion process, and the ability to have new or unusual ideas considered seriously by others. (41) Someone reading an online debate where divergent views are presented may conclude that such divergent views merely reinforce already held opinions. Those who have been part of such online discussion, however, have noted that a broadening of the views of the participants often happens as a result of the discussion, though it may not be documented in the particular discussion itself. Chuq Von Rospach, a Usenet pioneer, has described how he would introduce a new or novel idea and there would lots of disagreement with the idea. It would seem as if it had been useless to have introduced something new or novel into the discussion. When he returned to the discussion a week or two later, however, he would find that a number of people would be discussing his idea and considering how it was useful. I found a similar phenomenon in my experience online. (42)

Chang describes as an early phase of the anti-chosun movement, the creation of the online parody site Ddangji Ilbo (www.ddangi.com). (Chang 2005b, p. 926). "The prime target of Ddangji Ilbo was Chosun Ilbo." (Chang 2005b, p. 929). Also the web site Urimodu (www.urimodu.com) was created as an anti-chosun web site. Its objective, Chang writes, was "to organize a movement to close down Chosun Ilbo." (Chang 2005b, p. 927). A turning point in the anti-chosun movement, however, was when "netizens began to create their own online media to initiate alternative media reform." Though the parody media gave a voice to criticism of Chosun Ilbo, "They failed," Chang explains, "to emerge as alternative media. The most representative new media that have overcome the hurdles that appeared in the early stage of the anti-chosun movement are OhmyNews and websites like Seoprise.com." (Chang 2005b, p. 929)

"Capitalizing on citizen's participation and interactive communication," OhmyNews and Seoprise and its offshoots "have forcefully challenged the existing media." (Chang 2005b, p. 928) Chang cites the role they played in the campaign for the presidency of South Korea in support of Roh Moo-Myung. The Seoprise web site began October 14, 2002. It was established by Seo Yeong-seok and others who supported Roh in the 2002 election. During the 2002 Presidential campaign "up to 100,000 netizens visited Seoprise every day to participate in online debates that favored Roh whenever important campaign issues emerged." (Chang 2005b, p. 931) Arguments over the issues were promptly generated. "Seoprise functioned as an online eye of the storm for the so-called Roh Moo-Hun wind," writes Chang. (Chang 2005a, p. 404)

Articles posted on the Seoprise website are like columns supporting positions on particular politicians. The web site was structured in a way where a few participants who had achieved the status of columnists would frequently submit columns. The web site also included a place where those visiting it could post their comments on others columns, or submit their own columns. Among the heated debates on the web site were discussions on issues like the dispatch of Korean troops to Iraq. Through such debates certain issues emerged where those who found themselves disagreeing with the dominant position left the web site and created other web sites such as Politizen. Politizen is a web site created on May 21, 2003 (www.politizen.org) (43)

Similarly some netizens split from Politizen on September 15, 2003 and formed Namprise (www.namprise.com). Chang proposes that such splits have a political significance.

"In the case of Seoprise," writes Chang, the policies of "President Roh Moo-Myun and the Uri Party are supported. Namprise supports President Kim Dae-Jung and the millennium Democratic Party. Politizen does not formally express support; however, it is generally critical toward President Roh and tends to support both the Millennium Democratic Party and the Democratic Labor Party." (Chang 2005a, p. 406)

Chang observes that conservative users haven't formed online sites like Seoprise and its offspring, as they "can express and exchange opinions in online discussion forums provided by the websites of the conservative media, such as chosun.com joins.com and donga.com." (Chang 2005a, p. 406.)

A characteristic of Seoprise that has developed, according to Chang, is that netizens will avoid discussing issues where they disagree with a policy of Roh. (Chang 2005a, p. 406) He offers as an example the way issues like the construction of a nuclear dump site dispute is treated at the different online sites. (Chang 2005a, p. 407). While Seoprise avoided discussion of the issue, it was discussed seriously on Politizen and Namprise. Similarly with regard to the issue of sending Korean troops to Iraq, Politizen and Namprise discussed the issue, while discussion of the issue is avoided on Seoprise. (Chang 2005a, p. 408) Politizen was created with a commitment to represent a variety of views. A characteristic of these three web sites, however, is to encourage the expression of strong viewpoints for particular political trends. Chang proposes that this contributes to a higher level of participation than on those sites where more general discussion occurs like Updorea and Jungprise. (Chang 2005a, p. 407)

Along with the ability to develop a broad perspective provided by the Internet, there is similarly the ability to develop a particular viewpoint. Seoprise is an example where the discussion of issues contrary to the policy of Roh are limited. OhmyNews, similarly, has been criticized by some as having a tendency to limit discussion of issues which diverge from policy decisions of the Roh government.

Chang explains that online media like OhmyNews and Seoprise functioned as an "epicenter of activities that lead the movement for political reform against conservative hegemony." Netizens have created and use such online media "to produce and exchange values and arguments that challenge the existing social order." (Chang 200b, p. 933) He points out that these online forums also provided a way for netizens to participate in political processes as elections. This has succeeded in reducing the power of the conservative media, and has provided support for the increased political participation of citizens. Chang proposes that such developments accelerate the "hitherto prolonged and delayed process of democratic consolidation." (Chang 2005b, p. 933)

The online media are richly endowed with devices that facilitate citizen participation and exchange of opinions, both of which support the pursuit of political goals." And the netizen consciousness makes it possible

to form the new social and cultural reality. (Chang, 2005b, p. 934) "A Korean case shows that online media are powerful tools for communicative or participatory democracy," writes Chang, "This has important ramifications, not only for the future of democracy in Korea, but also for any other countries where political potential of online exists." (Chang 2005b, p. 934)

VIII - Conclusion

In his book "Democracy After Democratization," Choi explains the significant role that the mainstream conservative media has played in Korean society since the June 1987 democratic victory. In a chapter titled "Politics Ruled by the Press," Choi describes the power of the press over political institutions of South Korea. "If anyone asks me who moves the politics in Korea," he writes, "I would say it is the press." (Choi 2005, p. 41)

According to Choi's argument, it is not government officials who determine the political issues and priorities to be considered. Instead it is the press that sets the agenda and priorities for the political officials, who "adjust their role according to what is reported that day in the press." (Choi 2005, p. 41) The conservative press wielding this power (Choi wrote his book prior to the 2002 election of Roh) was in possession of what Choi characterizes as unbridled power, unchecked by any democratic process. Choi proposes that democracy is a process by which justice emerges from the conflict between various opinions and interests. To have a democratic society, a continuous process of reform is needed, one that can continually counter the resistance of the conservative vested interests. Otherwise the society can regress and there is the danger of reactionary forces gaining dominance. To continue the advance toward a more democratic society, Choi maintains that there is a need for "efforts to continually develop institutional mechanisms to defend it, [to] foster values appropriate to it and further nurture it." (Choi 2005, p. 50)

The online media developing in South Korea is a new form of institutional mechanism. This institutional mechanism is helping to defend, foster and nurture the continuing development of democracy in Korea. Similarly, the netizens, the online citizens who participate in online forums discussing and debating the issues of the day and the social goals needed to continue the struggle for democracy, are the heirs of the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s.

While I have presented some of the variety of online forms that netizens in Korea have developed and contribute to, there are many more that could be discussed. These include Cyworld, blogs, web sites for the discussion of music or human rights or ecology issues, just to mention a few. Also there are web sites where serious social or political questions are raised, as for example, where the authenticity of photos of human rights violations by the North Korean were challenged.

Just as the first draft of this paper was being written, three web sites for the discussion of scientific developments have gained the spotlight in newspapers and scientific journals around the world. These web sites are Scieng (Association of Korean Scientists and Engineers) (www.scieng.net), BRIC (The Biological Research Information Center) (bric.postech.ac.kr), and the Science Gallery of DCInside (www.dcinside.com). They gained prominence

in a controversy that developed in South Korea over possible ethical and fraudulent breaches in stem-cell research by a prominent scientist. (44) Issues raised on these web sites led to articles in the print media in Korea and around the world and even in international scientific journals. Young scientists in Korea posting in BRIC have been proposed as the 'Netizens of the Year' for the role they played in helping to uncover fabricated data and scientific claims in well respected scientific articles by Hwang Woo-sook who had been a nationally and internationally acclaimed scientific researcher. (45)

The subject matter of these online forms, however, are not the salient aspects. Rather it is the fact that via this new form of communications media, netizens are able to speak out about their views and the problems they deem important and to hear and think about the views and concerns of other netizens. One of the early participants in the US student group SDS remembers a talk by Arnold Kaufman at the SDS conference creating the Port Huron statement on participatory democracy. She writes (46):

"At one point, he declared that our job as citizens was not to role-play the President. Our job was to put forth our own perspective. That was the real meaning of democracy -- press for your own perspective as you see it, not trying to be a statesman understanding the big picture."

Such a process makes possible the active involvement of people in the discussion of issues they find of interest. As each person argues for his or her viewpoint in discussion with others with similar or different viewpoints, a vibrant debate can ensue. It is just such a process that Choi considers necessary for democracy. This is the kind of process that has been nourished by the online media in South Korea and it has in turn led to the spread and continuing development of the Internet.

The online media has had an impact on many areas of Korean society, including election campaigns. The General Election campaigns of 2000 and the Presidential Election campaign in 2002 have been especially impacted by online discussion and debate. Describing the role of the Internet in the 2000 election in an article from her thesis, Jeong Hoiok then of Ewha Woman's University, writes (47):

"The 16th general election [April 2000] was the first in Korea in which the real world and virtual world came together thanks to information technology. Indeed, even well established candidates have come to actively use the Internet as an effective campaign tool, while the homepage of the anti-incumbent Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Election was visited by more than 900,000 Internet users. Even the Central Election Management Committee made the headlines when it disclosed on the Internet the military records, personal assets, and any criminal records of registered candidates. Moreover, a number of websites are actively engaged in political activities on an ongoing basis."

In a special feature of the French newspaper, La Monde, about the 2000 Korean General Election, published on April 25, 2000, the editors observed that "the Internet served as a catalyst for the development of a new form of democracy," during that election. The editors then predicted that, "Once today's information technology is fully applied, this will significantly contribute to furthering Korea's democratization. (Hoiok, p 5)

The varied forms of online media that have developed in the past several years in Korea are helping to nourish a new form of democracy, participatory democracy. Participatory democracy, in turn, is helping to foster the continuing development and spread of the Internet in Korea. The continuing development of the Internet and of the netizens protect and nurture new online forms that have become a new institution for the continuing struggle to maintain and extend democracy

Notes:

- (1) La Do-sam, "Understanding Korea's Internet Development and Cyber-culture", Korea Focus, Sep-Oct 2003, Vol 11, No. 5, p. 1.
- (2) Michael Hauben, "The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net has on People's Lives, "Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet," IEEE Computer Society, 1997.
- (3) Choi Jang Jip, "Democratization, Civil Society, and the Civil Social Movement in Korea: the Significance of the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Election," Korea Journal, Autumn 2000, p. 46.
- (4) Choi Jang-Jip, "Democracy after Democratization: the Korean Experience," Humanitas, Seoul, 2005.
- (5) Han Sang-Jin, "Economic Development and Democracy" Korea Journal, Summer 1995, p. 13.
- (6) quoted in Michael Hauben, Participatory Democracy from the 1960s and SDS Into the Future Online", 1995.
<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/netdemocracy-60s.txt>
- (7) Kilnam Chon et al, A Brief History of the Internet in Korea, 2005.
- (8) Izumi Aizu, "A Comparative Study of Broadband in Asia: Deployment and Policy, 2002, p. 11-12.
- (9) Chon
- (10) Hauben, SDS, p. 8.
<http://opencollector.org/history/homebrew/netdemocracy-60s.html>
- (11) Michael Hauben, "Preface" in Hauben and Hauben, "Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet," p. X.
- (12) "The Net and Netizens" is reprinted as chapter 1 in "Netizens". There is the indication that "The Net and Netizen" was available in Korea by January 1994. It was listed in The Computer Underground Digest issue of January 2, 1994, which was available via ftp from: <ftp://cair.kaist.ac.kr/doc/eff/cud> COMPUTER UNDERGROUND DIGEST The Net and Netizens was in CONTENTS, #5.79 (Oct 10 1993) in File 6--The Net and Netizens.

The Computer Underground Digest is a weekly electronic journal/newsletter with subscriptions are available at no cost electronically from tk0jut2@mvs.cso.niu.edu and also at various ftp sites around the world. Jim Thomas, Department of Sociology, NIU, DeKalb, IL was the contact person. The url is: www.skepticfiles.org/hacker/cud601.htm

(13) Newsgroups: han.sci.med, han.announce From: s...@sun.hallym.ac.kr
(Huh Sun) Date: 1996/03/21 Subject: Proposal of the Korean terminology for
internet terms
<http://groups.google.com/group/han.announce/msg/ca5675194cadcf7e?hl=en&>

(14) Interview with Aniese Park, August 1, 2005,
Seoul.

(15) Heewon Kim's blog <http://hypercortex.net/ver2/index.php?pl=4#t1>

(16) When I was in South Korea in July 2005, a number of the people I met
considered themselves netizens. One person, in response to the question of
whether she was a netizen, answered, "I hope so." For other examples of
netizen consciousness around the world, see "The Emergence of the
Netizens: [Speech text] Ronda Hauben addresses the opening ceremony of the
OhmyNews International Forum 2005"

http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=234337&rel_no=1
See also: <http://www.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/netizensskorea.txt> "The
Rise of Netizen Democracy: A case study of the impact of Netizens on
democracy in South Korea"

(17) Chang Woo-Young, "The Internet, alternative public sphere and
political dynamism: Korea's non-gaek* (polemist) websites", Pacific
Review, Vol. 18, No. 3, September 2005, p. 398

(18) Won Sook-Yeon, Yeo Eun-Ho and Lee Bun-Soo, CMPC Computer Mediated
Political Communication and Its Impact on the Political Process in Korea",
1998, p.8 url:
list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind9812d&L=aejmc&T=0&F=&S=&P=3340

(19) Chang Woo-Young, "The Internet, alternative public sphere and political
dynamism: Korea's non-gaek* (polemist) websites", Pacific Review, Volume 18,
Number 3 / September 2005, p. 399
(referred to in the text as Chang 2005a)

(20) Yun Yeong-min (1996) A Theory of Electronic Information Space: A
Sociological Exploration of the Computer Network. Seoul: Jeonyewon, p.
70-1. Yun Yeong-min wrote me, 'Your book "Netizens": that was the one I
quoted in my first book. The book encouraged me to push my plan to write a
book on the cyberspace.' (Email, Yun Yeong-min, July 11, 2005.)

(21) Jongseon SHIN, Usenet post on April 10, 2005.

(22) Sam opened bbs.

(23) Kang. See also woo - p. 6-7 However, the government closed the "Free
Bulletin Board" in 1994 when public complaints on government policy
dramatically increased due to several grand-scale accidents in which
hundreds of people died. On the other hand, in August 1994, the Agency for
National Security Planning, which has been known for not permitting public
access, established a bulletin board on which more than 100 letters from
the public were posted within one month. "Yeolin Jeongboo (Open
Government)" is run by Gongbo-Cheo (The Bureau of Public Administration)
and has "Jeongchaek Toronshil (Policy Discussion Room)" which encourages

public participation in the policy making process.

(24) Won

(25) Choi, p. 128.

(26) Sang Jin Han, *Economic Development and Democracy*, Korea Journal, Summer 1995, p. See also Korea Focus (item #25, p. 7)

(27) Chang Woo Young,, "Online civic participation, and political empowerment: online media and public opinion formation in Korea, Media, Culture, and Society, Vol 27, No. 6, 2005, p. 928. See also Choi Jang-jip (2002) p. 17-38. (Referred to in the text as Chang 2005b) ("In particular, the conservative media - paradoxically major beneficiaries of democratization - have rapidly enhanced their authonomy and social influence, thereby emerging as an independent political institution".) (See also Park Seung-gwan and and Jang Gyeong-seob, 2001, p. 9-41)

(28) Cho Hee-Yeon, "The Role of NGO's in the Democratic Transition" p. 4.

(29) Gunho Lee, "Salience Transfer between Online and Offline Media in Korea: Content Analysis of Four Traditional Papers and Their Online Siblings", Paper Submitted to the 2004 Toronto Convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, AEJMC, 21st Nov. 2004,
<http://list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0411c&L=aejmc&T=0&F=&S=&P=25084>

(30) Korea Press Foundation, "General Trends in the Korean Press in 2000~2001 http://www.kpf.or.kr/eng/general/general_2001.jsp

(31) See for example: [KS] introduction/Choi Jang-jip Statement. Henry H. Em em@HUMnet.UCLA.EDU Mon, 23 Nov 1998 12:28:29 +0900.
http://koreaweb.ws/pipermail/koreanstudies_koreaweb.ws/1998-November/000912.html

(32) Committee to Protect Journalists Country Report, December 31, 1998.

(33) See for example the description in Rise of Netizen Democracy.

(34) Ronda Hauben, "OhmyNews and 21st Century Journalism", OhmyNews, September 8, 2005.
http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?article_class=8&no=246787&rel_no=1

(35) See for example, Ronda Hauben, "Dawn of the Internet and Netizen", OhmyNews, August 15, 2005.
http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?article_class=4&no=242311&rel_no=1

It is only a myth that the Internet was created as a communications media that would survive a nuclear war. Actually the Internet was created to provide an environment that is plastic, malleable, general purpose and interactive so as to foster collaboration.

(36) See for example, Oh Yeon Ho, "Korean Netizens Change Journalism and Politics", OhmyNews, December 14, 2004.

http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?article_class=8&no=201423&rel_no=1

(37) See Hauben, "Rise of Netizen Democracy" for a discussion of how the Internet made it possible for a more participatory form of election activity by netizens.

<http://www.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/netizensskorean>

(38) Kim Ki-tae, "Portal News Service Sweeps Online Media Scene", Korea Times, July 13, 2005.

<http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/200507/kt2005071319404410230.htm>

(39) Lo Do-sam, "Understanding Korea's Internet Development and Cyber-culture", Korea Focus, September-October 2003.

(40) Chang 2005b, p. 925

(41) See "The Rise of Netizen Democracy"

(42) It is interesting to realize that if one just studies a situation, rather than participating in it, one might not notice phenomena like this.

(43) Chang 2005a

(44) See "Fresh Mixup Casts Doubt on Cloning Pioneer's Research", Chosun Ilbo, South Korea, Dec 15, 2005

<http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200512/200512150008.html>

(45) See Article in Korea
http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?at_code=300437

This response is in English:
...(dongilone)

"I have firmly believed that truth prevails in the long run. I am choked with overflowing emotions of relief and joy, when I am aware that the future of Korean science will not be withered, with your brilliant performance, suffering frequent slanderings and other physical and mental threats to you young scientists, from blind followers of the God Lie. Momentary bitterness of setback is to be welcomed when lasting longer sweet fruit is to be savored.

I am proud of you young scientists.

I treat you all a large barrel of Makoli."

http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?at_code=299945

See also the Appendix in this paper.

(46) Hauben, SDS paper.

(47) Jeong Hoiok, "Information Society and Democracy in Korea," Korea

Focus, Sept-Oct 2000, Vol 8, No. 5, p. 1. See also the description of the 2002 campaign and the activities of Nosamo in Hauben, Ronda, "The Rise of Netizen Democracy."

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Chang Woo Young,, "Online civic participation, and political empowerment: online media and public opinion formation in Korea, Media, Culture, and Society, Vol 27, No. 6, 2005, p. 928 He refers to Choi Jang-jip (2002) p. 17-38. (Referred to in the text as Chang 2005b)

Chang Woo-Young, "The Internet, alternative public sphere and political dynamism: Korea's non-gaek* (polemist) websites", Pacific Review, Volume 18, Number 3 / September 2005, p. 399
(referred to in the text as Chang 2005a)

Choi Jang Jip, "Democratization, Civil Society, and the Civil Social Movement in Korea: the Significance of the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Election," Korea Journal, Autumn 2000, p. 46-49`

Choi Jang-Jip, "Democracy after Democratization: the Korean Experience," Humanitas, Seoul, 2005.

Han Sang-Jin, "Economic Development and Democracy" Korea Journal, Summer 1995.

Michael Hauben, Participatory Democracy from the 1960s and SDS Into the Future Online", 1995.
<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/netdemocracy-60s.txt>

Kilnam Chon et al, A Brief History of the Internet in Korea, 2005.

Izumi Aizu, "A Comparative Study of Broadband in Asia: Deployment and Policy, 2002.

Jeong Hoiok, "Information Society and Democracy in Korea," Korea Focus, Sept-Oct 2000, Vol 8, No. 5, p. 1. See also the description of the 2002 campaign and the activities of Nosamo in Hauben, Ronda, "The Rise of Netizen Democracy."

Won Sook-Yeon, Yeo Eun-Ho and Lee Bun-Soo, CMPC Computer Mediated Political Communication and Its Impact on the Political Process in Korea", 1998, p.8 url:
list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind9812d&L=aejmc&T=0&F=&S=&P=3340

(Won 1998)

Appendix

Stem Cell Fraud and the Netizens A Case Study

An important struggle developed in South Korea in Fall 2005 while I was working on a paper about Korean netizens. The struggle helps to demonstrate both the role of the netizen and the role of the online media in modern Korean life and the struggle for a more democratic society.

A research laboratory at Seoul National University directed by veterinary scientist Hwang Woo Suk published what were considered forefront research papers in the field of stem-cell research. His papers documented a technique for cloning stem cells, to produce patient specific cells to treat certain diseases, like Parkinson's disease, diabetes, and injuries like spinal column injuries.

Hwang's research was seen as promising for therapeutic treatment. He was treated as a national hero. He received substantial government funding and acclaim from the government of Roh Moo-hyun. Private commercial entities like Posco, South Korea's largest steel corporation and Korean Airlines supported his work. (1) The stocks of the biotechnology industry were affected by the progress of Hwang's research. (2)

A well known American scientist, Gerald Schatten, a Professor at the University of Pittsburgh in the US, and a well known reproductive biologist is listed as the senior author of Hwang's May 2005 paper. The paper, published in the prestigious scientific journal "Science" documented the production of 11 strands of patient specific stem cells through cloning.

Questions about possible ethical violations in Hwang's research were raised in an article in "Nature" after reporters for Nature visited Hwang's laboratory and learned that some of the ova that were used in his research may have come from donations from women who worked as part of his research team. This is contrary to ethical guidelines which mandate that donations be voluntary. If a woman is in a subordinate position in a research project, her donation may be induced under pressure from her job.

Based on information from a former research colleague of Hwang's, a TV documentary by PD Notebook, an investigative news program of Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was produced in the Fall of 2005. The documentary raised a number of ethical questions about the ova used in Hwang's research.

The tv program promised a follow up documentary that would raise further questions about possible fraud in the professor's research. What followed, however, was a flurry of corporate and government support for Professor Hwang. This included mainstream media like Chosun Ilbo, government officials who formed an unofficial group called "Hwang-kum-pak-chui" ('golden bat') to support Hwang. (3) Supporters of Hwang created an online web site "We Love Hwang" to plan their defense of him.

The web site of the tv program was filled with posts challenging the critique of Hwang's research. Claims were made that the tv interviewers threatened researchers they were interviewing. A campaign was started to induce the advertisers of PD Notebook to withdraw their support for the program. The followup program was cancelled.

Some of the online media like OhmyNews and Pressian (another online newspaper) carried stories challenging the attack on the tv program. OhmyNews, an online newspaper, printed an article that compared the attacks on PD Notebook and others who were raising questions about Hwang's work to activities that took place in Nazi Germany. A group of Civil Society groups defended the importance of investigating the ethical issues. (footnote)

At first Professor Hwang denied any ethical breaches in his research. But after the first tv program he acknowledged that ova had been donated by two of the researchers in his lab. The Helsinki Declaration is considered to set the ethical standards for scientific research. It outlines the conditions under which ova can be donated. Among the criteria are that there be informed consent by the donors. It also requires that no force be involved, and that the donation be voluntary.

While a law governing such donations only went into effect in Korea in January 2005, language in the May 2005 paper published by 'Science' included language claiming that the Helsinki standard was adhered to.

An editorial in Chosun Ilbo attacked OhmyNews and Pressian for the questions they raised about Prof. Hwang's research, demonstrating the furor that was unleashed on anyone challenging the ethics or honesty of Hwang's research.

Similarly, the government promised to continue support for Hwang's research. Hwang's supporters claimed that the beneficial potential of his research, the promise that it could provide a cure for serious medical problems, was more important than possible ethical violations. Also the portals claimed that most of those online supported Hwang. The fact that a prestigious scientific journal like 'Science' had published Hwang's research papers presented as proof that the scientific community had verified his research.

Online, however, there was continuing discussion of the controversy over his research. The problems were discussed. Along with the online consideration of ethical problems with his research, the photos and other evidence he submitted to Science to support his May 2005 article were examined. At web sites for scientists like BRIC, scieng, and the Science Gallery of DC Inside, serious discussions went on about the articles. At the BRIC web site, the website of the Biological Research Information Center (<http://gene.postech.or.kr/bbs/>), an anonymous post explained how the photos appeared to be fabrications. Others at the scientific web sites discussed problems they observed in the data to support the claims of the articles.

Earlier posts on web sites raised suspicions that pictures on the Science web site presenting the data evidence for the Hwang's articles did not support the claims in his article. Instead it appeared that photos 5, 6 & 8 and 3, 4, 7, 8 and 11 were from the same stem cells, not 11 different stem cells as the article claimed.

Also members of the Association of Korean Scientists and Engineers

(www.scieng.net), the Biological Research Information Center (BRIC). and the Science Gallery of DC Inside posted messages in the various web sites saying the stem cell in picture No 5 accompanying Hwang's article in Science and the picture No 1 in an article by researchers from the MizMedi Hospital, which was submitted to the US "Journal of Biology of Reproduction" were virtually the same. MitiMedi Hospital is a fertility clinic in Seoul that collaborated with Hwang on his research.

Co-authors of this article were Roh Sung-il, the hospital's head, Chun Sung-hye o Seoul National University, and Kim Sun-jong, who had worked at the hospital with Roh. Seeing the discussion about the duplication of photos in the two articles, Chun posted a message on the DC Inside and BRIC websites where he said "the mistake was due to confusion of the folders where the pictures had been saved." (4) The article was subsequently withdrawn from the journal to correct the photos.

Discussing whether Koreans should feel upset over this exposure of fraudulent activities by a top scientist, some posters argue that 'No'. They were proud that young scientists on the online scientific web sites, Korean netizens, had taken up the challenge to publicly air their suspicions about the integrity of the data in Hwang's paper. These netizens were willing to challenge the government, the press, the sscientific hierarchy in Korea, and even a scientific journal with an international reputation.

The fact that the U.S. journal 'Science' could publish fraudulent articles shows the need for serious discussion about their peer review process and the need to have a community which will raise questions when needed about the scientific papers and and research they publish.

In response to the online explanation of the problems in Hwang's articles, professors at his university, Seoul National University (SNU), petitioned that there be an investigation into his research. A panel was formed. After investigating Hwang's work and examining whatever notes and records they could find, the panel declared that that there was no clonings of stem cells, i.e. no patient specific stem cells had been produced by Hwan'ts laboratory.

This set of events demonstrates the power of the online media that is developing in Korea. The online sites of scientific reserachers like BRIC, scieng, and Science Gallery of DC Inside, were able to stand up against the full fury of attacks from the establishment in South Korea. They were supported by others in the online community, by those on discussion forums and blogs, and by online media like OhmyNews, and Pressian.

This is a support for democracy. One blogger wrote that the hierarchy within scientific laboratories in Korea makes it difficult for young researchers to speak up and to fight abuse. The fact that the problems could be pinpointed and then treated seriously despite the critical set of attacks on those raising these issues is a significant step for Korean democracy.

Notes

(1)Yoon Chang-hee, "Stem cell controversy being felt by sponsors", Joongang Ilbo, December 16, 2005)
<http://joongangdaily.joins.com/200512/16/200512162202553239900090509051.html>
Another major supporter is the chairman of Dongwon Group (Kim Jae-chul)
"Dongwon F&B Co. was one of the first companies to cancel its television commercial spot from Munhwa Broadcasting Corp.'s Newsdesk, a nightly news program that reported on doubts about Dr. Hwang's work."

2) biotech companies hurt financially
2005 Top 10 News
December 29, 2005 . Hwang woo-suk
<http://joongangdaily.joins.com/200512/28/200512282211430709900090409041.html>

3) from 'Hwang Woo-Suk: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia'
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hwang_Woo-Suk

Ties with Park Ki-young, Science and Techonolgy Advisor for the President, "yielded a favorable environment for Hwang in the government, as a non-official group consisting of high-ranking government officials was created to support Hwang's research that includes not only Hwang and Park, but also Kim Byung-joon, Chief National Policy Secretary, and Jin Dae-jae, Information and Communications minister. The group was dubbed as 'Hwang-kum-pak-chui,' a loose acronym made from each member's family names which means "golden bat" in Korean."

(4) Fresh Mixup Casts Doubt on Cloning Pioneer.s Research
Chosun Ilbo (english), December 15, 2005.

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